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CATALOGUE OF THE FIRST AMERICAN EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURE BY HUNT DIEDERICH, WITH INTRODUCTION BY CHRISTIAN BRINTON, HELD AT THE KINGORE GALLERIES, SIX SIXTY EIGHT FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, FROM APRIL TWENTY UNTIL MAY TWELVE, NINETEEN TWENTY.

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Apres Midi d'un Faun

HUNT DIEDERICH

BY CHRISTIAN BRINTON

Armed with that resolute purpose which is the special prerogative of the earnest-souled critic, I determined one propitious spring afternoon to verify for myself the existence of the elusive Hunt Diederich. Realizing that he had always flatly set his face against exhibitions and interviews, I considered myself fortunate in finding this versatile apostle of plastic form actually accessible to a visitor from the outer world. The man who endows his art with such unfailing creative vitality, whose conception of sculpture is kinetic, not static, a thing of life and movement rather than academic immobility, is a fluent, picturesque talker, full of pertinent comment and observation. Being in a receptive frame of mind, I induced him to proceed without question or interruption, and herewith is the substance of our impromptu duologue. In no sense profoundly exegetic, these informal notes serve to suggest the artistic physiognomy of the man who within a singularly brief period has come prominently before the public. They depict him as he is, or rather as he was that sparkling afternoon as he paced back and forth across the studio floor.

"I am," he began in retrospective vein, "a kind of stormy petrel of life and art, a sort of bird of passage in perpetual flight from one point to another. Born on my father's landed estate in Hungary, my boyhood was spent mainly in Switzerland, where I attended school in Vevey and Lausanne. I recall nothing of my father saving that he was passionately fond of his dogs and horses. As a child of five I embarked upon my artistic career by cutting out silhouettes of animals with a pair of broken-pointed scissors, for I love animals first, last and always. I later took to carving my favourite models out of wood, and never have I ceased devoting a large part of my energies to animal subjects in some form or other. Animals seem to me truly plastic. They possess such a supple, unspoiled rhythm.

"At the age of seventeen I came to America for the first time, and doubtless in the interest of my intellectual betterment was sent to the Milton Academy. I proved, I fear, a somewhat refractory student, and following my enforced retirement from academic halls came the happiest episode of my entire career. It was an interval passed as a cowboy on the big ranges of the Southwest, chiefly in Arizona and New Mexico. Still, though I enjoyed to the full the exhilarating freedom of ranch life, I secretly longed to return to that which I loved most—my art—and so I enrolled as a student

in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

"It is with a deep sense of affection and gratitude that I recall my sojourn at the historic Philadelphia institution, where I had as a fellow-pupil Paul Manship, and where I readily mastered the elementary technique of my craft. Following a certain fragrant episode that did not particularly endear us to the powers that be, Manship and I left for a summer in Spain, and during the succeeding decade I travelled, studied, and practised my profession in various Continental capitals, notably Rome and Paris. The success of my Greyhounds at the Autumn Salon of 1913 gave me a certain European position, and by the outbreak of the War I was well established and had numerous important commissions in hand."

During a momentary pause, I examined more closely the Greyhounds, which are known to the New York public through having been clandestinely placed in Central Park for an all too brief period. Instinct with movement and essentially stylistic in conception, it is small wonder that this spirited group should have been enthusiastically received by such critics as Clément Morro, Louis Vauxcelles, and Guillaume Apollinaire, and have won for the artist the distinction of being made a member of the enlightened and progressive Salon d'Automne.

Fountain

Having sufficiently covered the personal aspects of his career, Diederich forthwith plunged into more professional considerations: "Before beginning a piece of work I make up my mind precisely what I want to do, and then endeavour to catch my impression on the wing, as it were. I try to execute it at the moment when I see it most clearly and most completely, no matter where I may happen to be at the time. I first make a rapid sketch in wax, which I carry about for emergencies and thus have ready at hand. This sketch is small, as small as possible, so as to entail no waste of time or energy. I execute a quantity of these quick sketches, which I leave around the studio and turn to as I feel inclined. Those that seem vital and interesting I work into more permanent form, the rest I forget. I do a lot of small, decorative, and in a sense utilitarian things, for I believe that art should begin at the bottom, not the top. Art should be useful, should fulfill some specific end and purpose in our lives and homes. There can be as much aesthetic joy in making a candlestick or designing the leg of a table as in the treatment of the nude. Personally I like to work in as many different media as possible. Sculpture has been too long an affair of marble and bronze. It is too remote, too inaccessible. We must do everything possible to extend its scope and appeal, to insure for it a wider, more popular acceptance.

"My effort," he continued with enthusiasm, "tends toward the evolution of a distinctive style. When I have once perfected a definite style, and by style I do not mean mannerism, or even manner, I shall be ready to attack any given problem. Style is to me the crystallization of one's taste and one's convictions, and art without style is like a dog without breed. Success in art is, I think, more often than is generally supposed, a matter of how you begin. If you start a thing right, you are apt to finish it right, but if you start without faith or spirit, your work will always remain inert and lifeless. One should complete a piece of work with the same degree of enthusiasm one possesses at the outset. Pleasure in creation, in creative effort, is the touchstone of artistic achievement. A thing not done with pleasure is as dead as a thing done for mere duty."

You have here the somewhat hedonistic and certainly stimulating aesthetic credo of one of our most individual plastic artists. Hunt Diederich is a man who, with ceaseless inventive zest, touches every phase of his profession and achieves results that seldom fail to attract or inspire. In his supple, aristocratic figures, his slender candlesticks, or fanciful firescreens, he reveals a personality as rare as it is welcome. Pagan in spirit, this art is contemporary in accent and appeal. For if modern painting has resolved itself into a

Fire Screen

struggle to simulate third dimensional effects. sculpture with Diederich has renounced a certain rotundity—may we not say flatulence—of form. and has become light and lineal. an affair of rhythmic contour and expressive silhouette.

And as you survey the first collective presentation of this work, with all its nervous elegance of outline and deftly sublimated masses, you will not fail to pay tribute to the man who has helped restore to contemporary sculpture the long neglected principle of movement, the kinetic note that has become so significant a part of latter-day vision and feeling.

The art of Hunt Diederich is both sophisticated and elemental, both patrician and primitive. Full of spontaneous creative joy, this child of the wide-sweeping Hungarian puszta has glanced backward across the ages. Impatient of academic impersonality, he has pursued line and form with fresh, unfettered enthusiasm. He has recaptured for us something of that spirited verity of eye and hand which characterizes the inimitable rock tracings in the caves of Altamira. For in any consideration of plastic achievement it must not be forgotten that there were artists before the symmetrical Greeks.

From a Linoleum Cut

HUNT DIEDERICH

A l'exemple de Schiller, le sculpteur Hunt Diederich pourrait hautement dire: « Je suis un citoyen du monde ».

Son grand père maternel, William Morris Hunt, de Boston (Etats-Unis), fut un peintre remarquable, ami de Millet et de Manet, qu'il fit apprécier aux Etats-Unis, où il a fait introduire leurs œuvres dans les musées; elles y voisinent maintenant avec les siennes propres. Fils d'un propiétaire foncier hongrois, M. Hunt Diederich est né en Hongrie; mais il s'est fait naturaliser américain (surtout pour bénéficier des privilèges que donne cet excellent pays à ses nationaux et aussi à cause de sa famille).

Cet intéressant sculpteur ne se rappelle pas avoir habité successivement plus de deux ans et demi le même pays. Il semble pourtant vouloir se fixer plus longuement en France, bien qu'il aime passionnément les horizons nouveaux et par dessus tout l'indépendance.

Une autre particularité du caractére de M. Hunt Diederich est de comprendre l'art non pas comme une profession servant à représenter le beau d'après les prescriptions de la tradition, mais simplement comme l'expression de ses sentiments intimes et leur interprétation matérielle. Il ne veut pas, selon sa propre expression, « se déchirer le cœur pour se nourrir le corps ».

Aussi trouve-t-il un grand plaisir à exposer aux Indépendants, le seul Salon où chaque artiste peint comme il veut, ce qu'il veut, sans méthode imposée, sans procédés, et même en raillant, au besoin le bon public et les sévères et compétents (?) critiques à la recherche de talents nouveaux.

Cependant, son *Chevalier* en ciment et les divers groupes qu'il exposait au tout récent Salon des Indépendants, cette année, comme d'autres sculptures que nous avons vues de lui, sont des œuvres qui ne peuvent laisser indifférent, car elles témoignent d'un art original et bien vivant, joint à un grand sens d'observation. Ses animaux surtout sont pris et campés en pleine vie, dans un mouvement toujours juste et précis.

Aussi est-il d'autant plus vif notre regret de ne pouvoir plus souvent voir des œuvres de Diederich, qui, à mon trés humble avis, est plus digne du titre d'artiste que beaucoup et non des moindres que l'on désigne communément sous ce vocable, en y adjoignant le qualificatif de « grand ».—*Clément Morro* in *La Revue Moderne*.

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Lent by Mrs. Walter Lewisohn
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28 Window Grate
Lent by Mrs. James Byrne
29 Window Grate
Lent by Mrs. James Byrne

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